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SUBJECT: S/GWI PROJECT PROPOSAL: WOMEN TRAFFICKING VICTIMS
IN IRAQ

REF: STATE 00132094

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Despite the absence of comprehensive data, trafficking of women and girls for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and indentured servitude in Iraq appears to be a persistent and widespread problem. As the Government of Iraq (GOI) has not taken significant steps to address its trafficking problem and lacks the capacity to provide protection and rehabilitation services to victims of trafficking, this responsibility has fallen to NGOs and civil society. The Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), a Baghdad-based NGO, has set up a rehabilitation and reintegration process to provide women and girl victims of trafficking the economic and educational support to leave their histories of abuse and exploitation behind and become productive members of Iraqi society. The structured, sustainable, and easily measurable nature of OWFI's standardized 12-month reintegration program for female victims of trafficking lends itself to the conventions of S/GWI's small grants initiative. The following funding request proposes that S/GWI allocate USD 100,000 in funding through its small grants initiative to OWFI for a 12-month period to support the group's work in combating the devastating effects of human trafficking, increasing awareness of human trafficking, and reducing the cultural and social stigmas facing female victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation. End summary.

TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND GIRLS IN IRAQ

¶2. (SBU) Iraqi women and children are trafficked within the country and abroad for commercial sexual exploitation. While there are no official figures on how many Iraqi women and girls have been trafficked due to the diffuse and highly stigmatized nature of the problem, some Baghdad-based activists place the figure in the tens of thousands. Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Yemen, Turkey, Iran, and United Arab Emirates are destination countries for these women and girls. NGO contacts find that difficulties with quantifying the scale of the problem are compounded by a common understanding among traffickers that it is easier to take victims across borders on fake documents than to cross from province to province within Iraq, where there is a greater likelihood that victims will be recognized by relatives or acquaintances. Years of instability and violence following the fall of the Saddam regime created a unique set of demographic, social, and economic problems in Iraq that have enabled traffickers and criminal elements to take advantage of the lack of police oversight and GOI capacity to target widows, women, and girls whose destitution and lack of access to basic services rendered them particularly vulnerable. The stigma of compromised virginity in Iraq for female trafficking victims who do escape or get rescued from brothels, employers, or exploitative circumstances is significant, resulting in abandonment or violence for many victims at the hands of their families and communities.

Unable and often unwilling to return to their families, women and girls who have been trafficked, raped, and otherwise abused and exploited lack a support system in Iraq. In many cases, these victims require economic assistance to meet basic needs, as well as assistance with education and training, counseling, and medical care. As the GOI has neither implemented legislation to prosecute and punish traffickers, nor taken decisive steps to protect and assist victims of trafficking, these individuals must rely on NGOs. Victims of trafficking, these individuals must rely on NGOs and grassroots organizations for help. Because prostitution is a crime in Iraq, some trafficking victims escape commercial sexual exploitation by getting arrested and landing in prisons and detention facilities. The complex challenges facing this vulnerable community of women and girls requires a creative and flexible solution that exceeds the capacity and political will of the GOI.

RECIPIENT ORGANIZATION AND WORK DESCRIPTION

13. (SBU) The Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), a Baghdad-based NGO founded in 2003, assists current and former female prisoners and victims of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and abuse. OWFI stands out as a well-established fixture among Iraqi NGOs in the nascent and rudimentary civil society that prevails in the nation's post-war environment. The organization has 43 employees, of whom three are salaried administrators and accountants and the rest are volunteers. The three salaried, administrative staff members are based in the greater Baghdad area, thereby ensuring sound technical and management capacity of the organization. OWFI employees conduct visits to prisons and

brothels to assist female victims of trafficking and, where possible, provide support to these women and oversee their reintegration into Iraqi society through a 12-month "host family" program. Additionally, OWFI is currently providing subsistence assistance to approximately 20 women and girls in prisons and detention centers in Iraq. OWFI president Yanar Mohammed conducts international outreach on a regular basis in Europe, the United States, and other countries in which large Iraqi refugee and diasporic communities reside, and a significant portion of OWFI's funding comes from overseas donors. For security and political reasons, the organization does not manage a safe house or shelter of its own, instead relying heavily on a network of "friends," host families in the greater Baghdad area who receive stipends from OWFI to house and support women and girls who are rescued from brothels, detention centers, or other exploitative situations. OWFI is officially registered with the Ministry of Planning, but receives no funds from GOI sources.

14. (SBU) At present, OWFI is working with approximately 40 women and girls who have been rescued from exploitative circumstances and placed with OWFI host families under the oversight of the organization's 12-month reintegration process. The crux of OWFI's work revolves around guiding these victims, whose average age is between 15 and 20, through a year-long effort to rebuild their lives and prepare themselves to reenter Iraqi society in a safe, productive manner. OWFI's system begins with an orientation process for a newly rescued victim, during which the organization introduces her to her host family and puts USD 100 towards buying her clothes, toiletries, and other essential items. The initial stage also involves assisting the victim by obtaining a "jensia" (identity document) for her. This document is necessary for registering the individual in school and pursuing any future employment. Host families oversee the school attendance, sustenance, and care of each girl in exchange for a monthly stipend of 200,000 Iraqi dinars (approximately USD 173) per month. OWFI also provides a USD 100 monthly allowance to each girl to use for her expenses, or to save for future use. A thrice yearly clothing allowance of USD 400 is also provided to each program participant. The yearly cost to OWFI for each female victim it guides through its 12-month program is USD 4500.

By associating a tangible, monetary value to steps forward on education and employment, the OWFI program has created an incentive-based assistance program that provides the financial wherewithal to find a way forward without turning back to a life of exploitation and abuse, in the process increasing the opportunity cost of recidivism. In order to guarantee that its funding is used appropriately and to help these women and girls troubleshoot the challenges they are likely to face during their year-long reintegration, OWFI conducts regular, unannounced home visits to each girl and host family throughout the process.

PROPOSED BUDGET FOR OWFI SMALL GRANT

15. (SBU) While the OWFI's 12-month reintegration process for victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation is not a conventional project, it is a well-established process that lends itself well to S/GWI's small grants initiative. All OWFI funding currently goes towards sustaining the organization's assistance mechanism for women and girl victims in OWFI host families, prisons, and detention centers. The organization now seeks to enhance efforts toward two key priorities: increasing emphasis on education and training programs for victims and initiate an educational campaign raising awareness of the TIP problem in Iraq.

16. (SBU) Embassy Baghdad's Political and Rule of Law sections propose a USD 100,000 funding request for OWFI, disseminated over a 12-month period: USD 45,000 to assist the organization with funding its core reintegration process for 10 Iraqi women and girls, USD 10,000 for an assistance fund for women and girl trafficking victims in prison, and the remaining USD 45,000 to initiate formal programming on gender-based violence and further develop educational opportunities and training mechanisms for women and girls who receive OWFI support. The first USD 45,000 allocation will help a fraction of the total number of victims the organization is currently assisting, but this level of USG support would free up other OWFI funds for use on longer-term projects. This would enable the organization to divert some of its energies away from fundraising and towards the effective planning, allocation, and oversight of programs, including the effective use of the other USD 45,000 towards the creation of sustainable educational mechanisms and training on gender based violence.

17. (SBU) This second allocation of USD 45,000 for the establishment of long-term education and training mechanisms and programming on gender-based violence will be broken down into the following budget items: USD 13,000 for the creation of an education and training program to assist women who successfully complete the OWFI's 12-month reintegration process, USD 13,000 for the creation and execution of an awareness campaign about gender-based violence and its links to human trafficking in Iraq; USD 13,000 for a year's salary for one Iraqi program manager to administer these two programs over the funding period; USD 5,000 for one scanner, one laptop computer, and several digital cameras to assist OWFI and program participants with documenting and collecting information that will assist the NGO with overseeing its grant and sending evidence of appropriate funding use to Embassy Baghdad's grant officer and grant representative; and USD 1,000 for the production of printed materials, including brochures to promote OWFI's campaign against gender-based violence and human trafficking.

18. (SBU) The USD 10,000 prison assistance fund will be used on an ad hoc, case-by-case basis to assist with emergency medical treatment, medication, and other essential expenses for female trafficking victims who have been arrested or detained on prostitution charges. The addition of these components to OWFI's portfolio of services for female victims of trafficking will contribute to a more

robust support system for women in Iraq, a group that continues to be marginalized and vulnerable.

GRANT MANAGEMENT, OVERSIGHT, & SUSTAINABILITY

¶9. (SBU) Embassy Baghdad's Office of the Rule of Law Coordinator has experience with the management and oversight of grants to Iraqi entities and is poised to work with OWFI to oversee the dissemination and appropriate use of funds over the proposed 12-month funding period. An ROL advisor will serve as the grant representative for this project. Embassy Baghdad's TIP reporting officer will assist with this project, and will work with the grant representative and OWFI personnel on the set up of the funding arrangement and the allocation of funds towards particular components of the proposal. OWFI staff have agreed to comply with USG-proposed oversight mechanisms for the funding period, including site visits by the grant officer and grant representatives, receipts for equipment expenditures, correspondence from program participants, and photographic evidence of project outcomes. The grant officer and grant representative will also work with OWFI to ensure that OWFI provides adequate assurances for future funding for the proposed education and gender-based violence components are secured by OWFI to guarantee the sustainability of the project.

IMPACTS ON THE BROADER IRAQI COMMUNITY

¶10. (SBU) This proposed funding for OWFI's assistance to Iraqi women and girl trafficking victims complements Embassy Baghdad's engagement with the GOI on initiatives related to capacity building, education, economic growth, and women's issues. Both the root causes and the devastating effects of human trafficking touch each of these areas. Due to the GOI's lack of capacity and political will to enforce substantive penalties for trafficking or to assist victims, further engagement with non-governmental entities is necessary to make initial progress on this issue. While organizations like OWFI operate on a small scale, these organizations like OWFI operate on a small scale, these entities form the only safety net available to female trafficking victims who escape or are rescued from cycles of entrenched poverty, abuse, and exploitation. Efforts such as S/GWI's small grants initiative demonstrate USG support for these essential, if micro-level, efforts. As this proposal marks the first anti-trafficking grant proposal initiated by Embassy Baghdad, it is a milestone in proposing a way forward in addressing a complex and serious problem that has hitherto received little attention in Iraq.

¶11. (SBU) Until the GOI addresses Iraq's trafficking problem through legislation and protections for trafficking victims, Iraqi civil society will drive the effort to raise awareness of and make progress on combating human trafficking. While USD 45,000 of the proposed USD 100,000 funding amount will go toward to basic care and sustenance of female trafficking victims, this investment will pay dividends in raising awareness of the problem and creating a

group of future advocates for OWFI's work and for the importance of women's education and empowerment. Just as trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation in Iraq thrives because of a highly developed network of smugglers, document forgers, limited border security, and other criminal organizations, the work of OWFI and other like-minded efforts strives to combat trafficking by similarly creating a network of advocates, activists, host families, and former trafficking victims who can lend their experiences and efforts to helping other women and girls out of desperate circumstances and raising the awareness of TIP within the Iraqi public.

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